BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

Stats

Infoline

Contact: bcstats.infoline@gov.bc.ca

Issue: 08-25

June 20, 2008

- **Prices in BC rise 2.1% in May**
- **New motor vehicle sales drop 7.0% in April**
- **Visitor entries flat in April**

Prices

- **British Columbia's year-over-year inflation rate jumped to 2.1% in May, as the all-items Consumer Price Index (CPI) climbed 0.4 percentage points from April.** The increase in the cost of energy (+7.7%) was higher than in the previous month (+6.6%), consequently putting inflationary pressure on the economy. Excluding energy, the overall increase in the CPI was 1.6%.

  Fuel prices helped drive transportation (+1.2%) costs up last month, as vehicle owners paid 8.0% more to fill up their tanks. However, the cost of purchasing or leasing a vehicle was significantly lower (-8.0%) than in May of last year. BC residents paid 3.7% more for shelter, as both owners (+3.5%) and renters (+2.1%) faced higher costs. Fuel oil (+38.7%) and electricity (+12.3%) continued to show dramatic increases, while prices for natural gas (-2.3%) were down. Home furnishings & equipment (+1.5%) also took a bigger bite out of the household budget, but the costs for maintaining & repairing a home (-1.4%) declined. BC residents paid slightly more for health and personal care (+0.6%) but saw some relief in costs for clothing (-3.1%). Food (+2.8%) prices climbed at a quicker pace than in recent months, with consumers paying more for food purchased from stores (+2.6%) and for dining out (+3.1%). However, the residual effects of the 2007 frost on the US West Coast along with the appreciation of the Canadian dollar could still be seen in the lower costs of fresh fruits (-3.6%) and vegetables (-3.3%).

  In general, consumers paid more for non-durable goods (+3.8%) and services (+3.3%) than in May of 2007 while prices for durable goods (-4.6%) deflated. Excluding food and energy, prices rose a relatively moderate 1.2%.

  Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **BC's inflation rate was the lowest in the westernmost part of the country in May.** PEI (+4.1%) saw the most significant average price increase in the country followed by Alberta (+3.7%) and Nova Scotia (+3.5%). Canada's inflation rate was 2.2%, due mostly to a 15.0% jump in the cost of gasoline and sustained increases in costs associated with owned accommodation.

  Among metropolitan areas, the inflation rate in Victoria (+1.9%) was notably lower than the provincial average, while Vancouver's (+2.4%) was slightly higher. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

The Economy

- **Sales of new motor vehicles in British Columbia tumbled 7.0% (*seasonally adjusted*) in April.** Sales of domestic trucks, registering a third consecutive monthly decline, and overseas-built passenger cars were primarily responsible for the hefty downturn in sales.

  Nationally, new motor vehicle sales were off 2.6% in April largely a result of flagging sales in Western Canada. Alberta (-8.7%), Saskatchewan (-7.1%) and Manitoba (-5.4%) all recorded lower sales. Meanwhile, sales increased in New Brunswick (+7.5%), Ontario (+2.1%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (+0.7%).

  Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats

- **Retail sales in BC slipped (-0.7%, *seasonally adjusted*) in April, erasing most of the gains made in the previous month.** New car dealers saw sales drop 4.7% following strong growth in March, while pharmacies & personal care stores (-2.3%) recorded lower receipts for the

Report Going the Distance: Commuting Patterns in BC

Did you know...
As the price of gas continues to rise, most Canadians who commute to work are walking more (37%) or using more gas-efficient cars (31%). *Source: Ipsos Canada*

fifth straight month. Nationally, retail sales rebounded (+0.6%) as most sectors posted gains.
Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats

- **British Columbia's wholesalers posted a 3.1% (*seasonally adjusted*) increase in the value of goods sold in April, the largest rise in sales registered since June 2007.** The jump in wholesale trade was largely the result of climbing sales in the machinery & electrical equipment (+4.8%) and building supplies (+2.7%) sectors. Wholesalers of both lumber & millwork (+7.4%) and food (+2.0%) products also saw higher receipts.

  Canadian wholesaler sales rose 1.4% in April on the strength of increased activity in the personal & household goods (+2.9%) and machinery & electronic equipment (+2.5%) sectors.
  Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats

Tourism

- **Visitor entries to Canada through BC were flat (+0.0%, *seasonally adjusted*) in April following two months of declines.** Same-day visits from the US (+3.9%) advanced, while overnight trips (-2.8%) fell for the third straight month. Overall, total US entries dipped 0.6%. However, there were more travellers from overseas countries (+1.8%), reflecting a double-digit increase (+16.6%) in the number of visitors from Oceania. Asian entries (-3.5%) were down but visitation from Europe (+0.5%) inched up.

  There were about 841,400 Canadians returning home via BC in April, down 8.8% from the previous month. Total trips to the US were off 9.7% while the number of Canadians returning from overseas (-2.1%) decreased for the first time in six months. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

Health

- **Provincial indicators showed that 18% of British Columbians aged 12 or older smoked either daily or occasionally in 2007, a rate unchanged from that of 2005 and still the lowest smoking rate in Canada.** Overall, men (20%) were more likely to smoke than women (16%) in 2007. However, these proportions are much more even among BC's youth aged 12 to 19 years, with young women (12%) only slightly more likely than young men (11%) to be smokers. Perhaps more troubling is that the number of youth smokers has crept higher from just under 10% in 2005 to slightly more than 11% in 2007.

  Nationally, over one-fifth (22%) of Canadians aged 12 or older were smokers in 2007, roughly the same rate as in 2005. About one-quarter of the populations of Saskatchewan (26%), Newfoundland and Labrador (25%) and Quebec (25%) reported that they were smokers in 2007, well above the national average.
  Data Source: Statistics Canada

Performing Arts

- **The live performing arts industry in BC received $119.7 million in operating revenues in 2006, up from $103.7 million in 2005.** Non-profit establishments generated nearly two-thirds ($73.7 million) of this total. Expenses also grew, but not as much, such that the industry's profit margin increased by almost four percentage points, rising to 13.0%. Together, Quebec and Ontario generated nearly three-quarters of total industry revenues in 2006, while BC's performing arts companies accounted for about ten percent. However, most provinces showed increased revenues between 2005 and 2006, while those in Quebec and Ontario saw overall revenues decline.

  Total attendance was down slightly in BC in 2006. However, this was due mostly to a decline in the number of performances (6,700 in 2004 compared to 5,800 in 2006), as the average attendance per performance was up significantly over 2004 (348 compared to 308, respectively).

  The nation's live performing arts industry received over $1.2 billion in revenue in 2006. Among non-profit establishments, theatre companies (48%) and music groups (25%) accounted for nearly three-quarters of total revenues, with the remaining 27% split among other groups such as dance, opera, skating shows and circuses. *Data Source: SC, Cat. # 87-F0003-XIE*

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For data originating from Statistics Canada, data sourced to 'Statistics Canada' has been retrieved from CANSIM, the agency's electronic database; otherwise the source is identified as 'SC' plus the catalogue number.

Infoline Report

Contact: Jade Norton
(250) 387-6056
Originally published in
Business Indicators Issue 08-05

Going the Distance: Commuting Patterns in BC

Given the increasing population in British Columbia, the number of people having to commute to work has risen considerably and will likely continue to do so in subsequent years. With organized initiatives, such as Bike to Work Week[1] becoming more popular, and increasing dialogue surrounding issues pertaining to climate change and traffic congestion in cities, it is more important than ever to investigate the commuting patterns of the province's workforce. How are British Columbians getting to work? Have BC's employed adapted their commuting patterns to reflect things like a heightened awareness of environmental impact, air quality or the rising cost of fuel? Information about commuting patterns can impart constructive insights to help businesses:

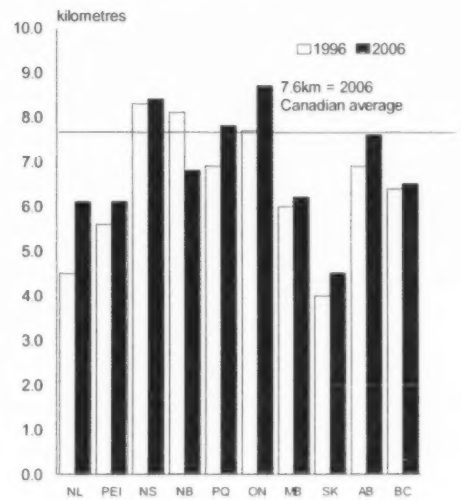
- identify prospective sources of labour,
- help workers access a wider range of employment prospects,
- support government and community organizations in preparing for labour force adjustments, and
- aid planners in the development of infrastructure, such as sustainable, effective transportation systems.

How far is far?

In 2006, workers in British Columbia travelled a median distance of 6.5 kilometres from their homes to their workplace.[2] This was up just slightly from a decade prior, when commuters travelled approximately 6.4 kilometres to get to their jobs.[3]

Despite the increase, British Columbians have somewhat less distance to cover than those in many other regions of the country. Workers in Ontario (8.7 km), Nova Scotia (8.4 km) and Quebec (7.8 km) travelled the longest distances to get to work in 2006. On the other hand, commuters in Nunavut (2.1 km), the Northwest Territories (2.9 km) and the Yukon Territory (3.9 km) travelled the shortest distances.

Commuting Distance has Increased in Most Provinces Over the Past Decade



Data Source: Statistics Canada

[1] For more information on Bike To Work Week in communities across the province visit: www.biketowork.ca

[2] Census respondents are not asked directly what distance they travel to work. Commuting distance is calculated on a straight line from home to work, not the actual route travelled. For most commuters, the actual distance would be longer. "Median distance" is defined as the point where half the population in a given region travels more than that distance, and the other half travels less.

[3] Individuals who "commute" to work are those with a usual place of work away from their home or no fixed workplace address.

Cars and more cars

As in the rest of the country, the car is still the most frequently used mode of transportation for getting to work in BC. However, there has been a noteworthy decline in the proportion of commuters in BC using a vehicle to get to work in the past ten years, (from 81% of workers in 1996 to 79% in 2006). The ratio of British Columbians who use a car to get to work is slightly lower than the Canadian average (80%), though the national average also declined slightly over the same period (from 81% in 1996).

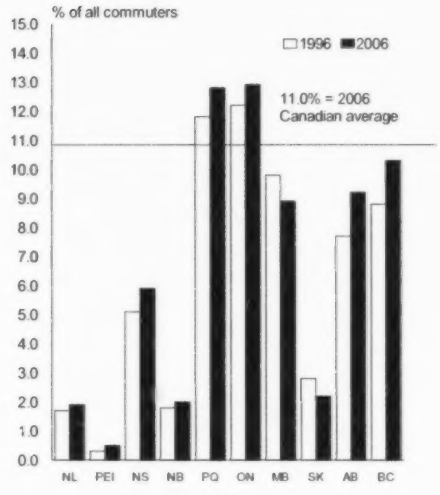
Alternative methods of commuting

Some of the decline in percentage of commuters using a car as their transportation of choice for their work commute may be attributable to increased ridership on public transit systems. In 2006, 10% of BC workers used public transit to get to work, compared to 9% in 1996. This corresponds to a 17.0% increase in ridership for the public transit authorities across the province since 1996.

Carpooling is also apparently becoming a more common commuting option in the province, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree. People riding to work as a passenger in a car represented eight percent of commuters in 2006, compared to seven percent in 1996, an increase of 5.5% over that period. Carpool lanes, increasing gas prices and more environmental awareness are possible factors that influence these types of commuting patterns.

In terms of carpooling and transit use for commuting, BC fares well when compared to other parts of the country. The proportion of BC commuters travelling as passengers in a vehicle in 2006 was on par with the national average (8%) and just slightly lower than that for those using public transit (11%). Across the country, younger commuters are the most likely to use public transit. Indeed, 16.6% of Canadian commuters aged 15 to 24 years travelled by transit in 2006, compared to just 7.2% of those aged 65 and over.

All But Two Provinces Show Increased Public Transit Use



Data Source: Statistics Canada

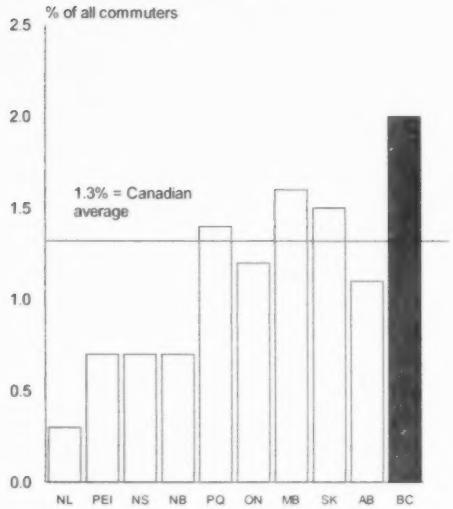
Active Commuting

Employed individuals in the province are also making strides in taking more physically active means of transportation. In May of 2006, nearly seven percent of BC workers were walking to work, higher than the average Canadian commuter (6%). Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan lead the pack, with the highest portion of commuters walking to their place of work in 2006 (each 8%).

BC continues to lead the country in terms of the proportion of workers travelling to work by bicycle. In 2006, two percent of the province's workforce pedalled their way to and from work, by far the highest share among the provinces and well above the national average (1%). However, despite BC's higher percentage of cycling commuters, the ratio has been relatively unchanged over the past decade and the proportion

remains quite small. Other than BC, in 2006, biking workers were most common in Manitoba (just under 2%) and Saskatchewan (1.5%), while commuters in parts of Atlantic Canada were the least likely to ride to work.

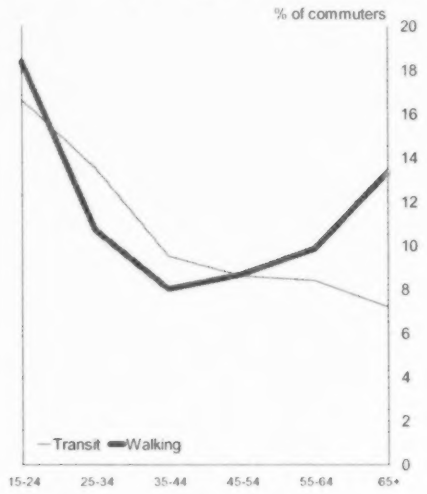
More BC Commuters Cycle to Work than in Any Other Province, 2006



Data Source: Statistics Canada

Despite overall low proportions of Canada's workforce riding their bicycles to work, for the country as a whole, bicycling appears to be gaining in popularity among certain commuters. For example, approximately one percent of commuters aged 45 to 54 rode to work in 2006, twice the proportion of the same age group ten years prior (0.5% in 1996). Young workers remained most likely to cycle to work, with 2% of Canadian men and women between 15 and 24 years of age riding their bikes to work in 2006.

Public Transit Use for Commuting Declines with Age, While Walking is Most Common Among Youngest and Oldest Age Groups



Data Source: Statistics Canada

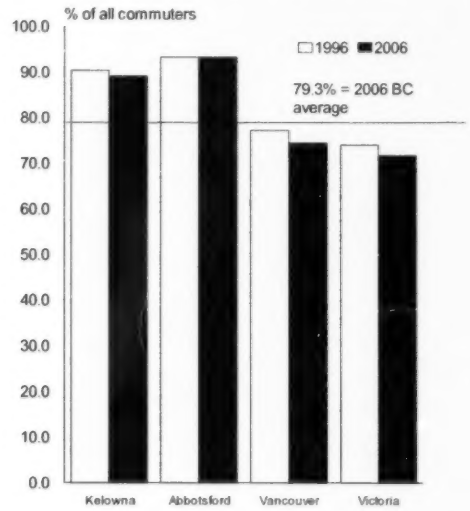
BC's urban commute

Although discussion and information on the use of public transit, private vehicles and other modes of transportation is of substantial interest to many regions of the province and across the country, the main transportation issues usually arise in the larger, most populated areas. Increases in the number of commuters and the fluctuation in their work and commuting habits pose significant challenges for transportation infrastructures in cities. Much of the fiscal pressure of urban development projects in larger cities comes from plans to improve existing transportation modes used by urban commuters. Plans such as new routes, extension of commuter train routes, High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, etc., can in turn have a significant impact on the commuting habits of workers in these agglomerations.

In 2006, 69% of workers living in one of Canada's 33 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) drove their car to work and 7% got to work as a passenger in a car. Among

CMAs in BC, Victoria boasted the smallest proportion of its workforce commuting in cars (65%). This was amid the lowest percentages in the country and well below the total for all 33 CMAs (77%). The proportion of workers living in three of BC's four CMAs who got to work by car, whether driving or as a passenger, dropped over the past 10 years. The drop was sharpest in Vancouver, where 74% of workers drove to work in 2006, compared to 77% in 1996, but was also notable in Victoria (74% in 1996 to 72% in 2006) and Kelowna (90% in 1996 and 89% in 2006). In contrast, Abbotsford saw no change over the same decade (93% in 1996 and 2006) and had the highest reliance on the car of any CMA in Canada.

Car Use for Commuting Has Inched Down in Three of the Province's Largest Cities

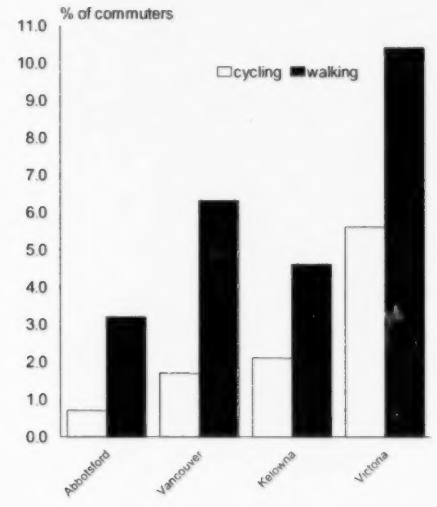


Data Source: Statistics Canada

In the rest of the country, Montreal (70%) remained the CMA with the smallest proportion of workers using a car to get to work, followed by Ottawa-Gatineau and the Toronto area (both 71%). In contrast, workers in Abbotsford (93%), Barrie and Windsor (each 91%) were the most likely to get to work by car.

Not surprisingly, given the size and scale of the cities, far more commuters travelled by transit in Vancouver (17% of all commuters in 2006) and Victoria (10%) than in other cities across the province. In general, the largest CMAs have more features that make public transit more appealing to many workers. Among other things, they are much more likely to have a well-established public transit system, which encourages workers to use it to get to their city centres. This reality is confirmed by comparing public transit usage in CMAs with populations of one million or more, such as Toronto (22%) and Montréal (21%), with those of the country's smallest CMAs, like Moncton (3%). However, since 1996, the use of public transit has increased in all four of BC's CMAs. In fact, in the decade between 1996 and 2006, although it remains low, the proportion of workers using public transit to get to work rose significantly in Kelowna (2% to 3%) and Abbotsford (1% to 2%).

Commuters in Abbotsford are Least Likely to Cycle or Walk to Work, 2006



Data Source: Statistics Canada

In 2006, workers residing in the province's capital city were the most likely of workers in all 33 of Canada's CMAs to walk to work (10%) and to cycle there (6%). Vancouver was above the average for Canada's CMAs (6%) for walking commuters, but both Kelowna and Abbotsford were lower (5% and 3%, respectively). On the other hand, commuters in Vancouver and Kelowna (each 2%) were both well above the national CMA (1%) average for biking to work in 2006.

Other Canadian CMAs that stood out in terms of relatively high percentages of pedestrians included Halifax and Kingston (each 10%), while cycling commuters were most prevalent in Kingston, Saskatoon, Peterborough and Guelph (each 2%).

Characteristics of BC's urban commuters

In a time where climate change is in the forefront of many discussions and agendas, attempts are increasingly being made to encourage residents of our province, and specifically of our cities, to use more sustainable transportation options to get to work.[4] Although it is likely that some individuals choose to use such sustainable modes in hopes of doing their part to curb environmental concerns and perhaps ease road congestion on major commuting routes across the province, the decision to use modes of transportation other than cars, such as transit, cycling and walking, can be more (or less) common among certain groups for a myriad of other reasons.

For example, lower income workers without a vehicle, young people, recent immigrants and people who live in the central neighbourhoods of cities in which they work likely do not 'choose' alternate modes of transportation, but use them out of necessity. Similarly, there are other groups who tend to be less inclined to use public transit or to walk or cycle to work.

Indeed, among workers aged 15 to 24 living in Vancouver, the proportion who used a sustainable mode of transportation to get to work in 2006 remained substantially higher (37%) than for older workers (19% for workers aged 45-64).[5] A similar trend is seen in Victoria, where 42% of commuters aged 15-24 used a sustainable method of getting to work, compared to just 14% of those aged 65 and over. However, the capital city has shown signs of increased use of such modes of transport among workers between the ages of 25 and 34 (28% in 2001 and 31% in 2006) as well as among those aged 55 to 64 (17% in 2001 to 19% in 2006). In Kelowna, commuters in just one age group showed an increase in use of sustainable transportation between 2001 and 2006, while all other groups were unchanged, or showed proportional declines. While young workers notably increased their use of alternate modes of transportation (16% in 2001 to 17% in 2006), the overall use of sustainable transportation among workers in Kelowna remained unchanged over the five-year period. The picture is somewhat different among workers in Abbotsford, where comparatively fewer commuters made use of sustainable modes of transportation. Use of alternate ways to get to work declined in every age group between 2001 and 2006, such that overall, commuters in this CMA were less likely to use sustainable transportation in 2006 than they were in 2001. This may in part be due to the greater distance that many of Abbotsford's employed travel to get to their places of work.

[4] 'Sustainable' commuting methods include transit, walking and cycling.

[5] It is difficult to estimate which age group has shown the most significant increase in use of sustainable transportation in Vancouver between 2001 and 2006, namely because of the transit strike of 2001 that had a major impact on ridership of commuters on public transit.

Workers in Abbotsford travel a median commuting distance of 7.3 kilometres in 2006, significantly higher than workers in Victoria and Kelowna (4.6 kilometres and 5.6 kilometres, respectively), but slightly lower than the median for Vancouverites (7.4 kilometres). It goes without saying that longer distances make walking or cycling less viable options. Other reasons such as accessibility by transit are also factors, in that some sectors are difficult to reach other than by car.

Also, as in Greater Vancouver's case, the central municipalities are frequently reached by workers by using public transit, walking or cycling, whereas their peripheral municipalities are mainly reached by car.

Recent travel patterns show that workers are commuting in all different directions, rather than in one main direction, as was the trend in past decades. Toronto transit advocate, Steve Munro, speaks to the plight of Toronto and surrounding area in developing the most effective transit system for its commuters. Munro sees the multi-directional commuting patterns of today's cities as one of the biggest challenges for transportation planners: "It's an everywhere-to-everywhere kind of demand pattern, and that's very hard to serve without building quite a large network of transit lines to make everywhere-to-everywhere commuting by transit possible."[6]

Despite such obstacles, it appears that the use of sustainable transportation by workers living a great distance from their place of work rose in all four of BC's CMAs between 2001 and 2006. Most notably, in 2001, 14% of workers in Vancouver who travelled 15 kilometres or more to work used a sustainable mode of transportation and by 2006 this proportion had reached 19%. Similar scenarios were observed in Victoria, Kelowna and Abbotsford, though to a lesser extent.

Nationally, Oshawa had the distinction of having the longest median commuting distance in Canada (11 kilometres) in 2006, while the shortest commute in the country was in Regina, where it was less than 4.6 kilometres.

Looking ahead

Commuting for work has become a commonplace occurrence in modern economies, especially around major urban centres. BC's cities and the province as a whole have shown signs of changing commuting patterns toward more sustainable methods in recent years. However, more steps need to be taken. As is demonstrated by the increased frequency with which transportation programs and initiatives (such as the Central Okanagan Transportation Demand Management Program for Sustainable Transportation and the Active Transportation Infrastructure Program in Saanich, BC) are being proposed and implemented, there are still great strides being made.[7]

[6] See: www.cbc.ca/canada/toronto/story/2008/03/04/car-toronto.html

[7] For more information on these and other initiatives in BC, see Transport Canada's List of Case Studies: www.tc.gc.ca/programs/environment/utsp/listofcasestudies.htm

Infoline

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BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Jan 1/08	% change on one year ago
BC	4,414.0	1.5
Canada	33,143.6	1.1
GDP and INCOME (Revised Apr 28)		
(BC - at market prices)	2007	% change on one year ago
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *($ millions)*	190,214	5.5
GDP *($ 2002 millions)*	163,200	3.1
GDP *($ 2002 per Capita)*	37,258	1.7
Personal Disposable Income *($ 2002 per Capita)*	24,728	3.0
TRADE ($ millions, seasonally adjusted)		% change on prev. month
Manufacturing Shipments - Apr	3,350	-0.2
Merchandise Exports - Apr	2,523	9.4
Retail Sales - Apr	4,775	-0.7
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX	% change on one year ago	12-month avg % change
(all items - May 2008)		
BC	2.1	1.4
Vancouver	2.4	1.7
Victoria	1.9	0.9
Canada	2.2	2.1
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		
(seasonally adjusted)	May '08	% change on prev. month
Labour Force - BC	2,426	-0.2
Employed - BC	2,317	-0.3
Unemployed - BC	108	2.9
		Apr '08
Unemployment Rate - BC *(percent)*	4.5	4.3
Unemployment Rate - Canada *(percent)*	6.1	6.1
INTEREST RATES (percent)	Jun 18/08	Jun 20/07
Prime Business Rate	4.75	6.00
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	6.95	7.05
- 5 year	7.15	7.24
US-CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	Jun 18/08	Jun 20/07
(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn $ per US $	1.0186	1.0646
(closing rate) US $ per Cdn $	0.9822	0.9372
AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE RATE		
(industrial aggregate - dollars)	May '08	% change on one year ago
BC	777.77	4.9
Canada	777.54	4.5

SOURCES:

Population, Gross Domestic Product, Trade, Prices, Labour Force, Wage Rate } Statistics Canada

Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics

For latest Weekly Financial Statistics see www.bankofcanada.ca

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Next week

- Business Indicators, June 2008
- Current Statistics, June 2008
- Migration Highlights, First Quarter 2008

BC Stats, Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, Box 9410 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, B.C. V8W 9V1
Tel: (250) 387-0327 Fax: (250) 387-0329 Web: www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca E-mail: BC.Stats@gov.bc.ca